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THE POWER OF PUBLIC PLUNDER.

THE element of disinterestedness is nearly gone from our politics. We do not all speak out so bluntly as the Colorado editor, who informed his readers that announcements of candidacy would be inserted at the uniform rate of five dollars, and that "all political work" would be charged to the person ordering it, unless it was paid for in advance. It would be better, perhaps, if the matter were put once for all upon such a simple footing. There was a convention held at Chicago last year at which some millions of words were spoken, and among them there were ten perfectly sincere ones, uttered by a voice from out of the Lone Star: "What are we here for if not for the offices?" Such is still the power of absolute sincerity over the human mind, that this was the effective speech of the occasion. All is forgotten but the noise of the chairman's hammer and this admirable epitome of the situation by Mr. O'Flanagan.

On a certain evening in October last, the writer of these pages was astonished to find himself sitting in the chairman's seat at what was supposed to be a political meeting. He enjoyed an interesting and a novel experience. The evening before, a committee called upon him and invited him (a most unpolitical person) to preside. He did not ask the committee by what gift of prescience they had been enabled to foresee that the assembled multitude would desire him to preside over their deliberations. He accepted the invitation without asking childish questions, and thus became part of a splendid show! On the evening designated, the town was in a blaze of glory, chiefly generated by the "patent campaign torch," supplied on favorable terms by a firm of dealers in the numerous articles which are now described as "campaign material"; a business the volume of which ran into the millions last year. A

band of music was provided, of course. There was a procession of boys and young men in very showy uniforms. Carriages were in attendance to convey participants from the hotel to the place of meeting, a toilsome journey of almost two hundred yards. The scene presented in the interior of the hall was highly animated and striking: the walls draped with flags, the uniformed boys all seated together, a brilliant parterre of young eyes and glowing color, the clubs of young men wearing rosettes and badges, the band picturesquely placed, the platform well covered with citizens. Nothing was wanting to the scene except a good solid background of disinterested audience. The audience was "shy." The room would have held a thousand people; but, omitting persons who constituted the attractive force of the occasion, there may have been three hundred genuine auditors.

The proceedings, too, had almost every quality except that of spontaneity. The audience had precisely as much voice in deciding what those proceedings should be, as the guests of a wealthy house have in determining the bill of fare at the banquet to which they are invited; as much voice as Roman voters had in the selection of the gladiators and the lions that were to be torn for their amusement in the Coliseum. The chairman, the vice-presidents, and the secretaries were announced, not elected; and, it must be owned, they were provided in ample numbers. The chairman, in his extreme ignorance and childlike innocence, blurted out the whole truth of the situation. He remarked that his respected Uncle had then in his service one hundred thousand persons, most of whom were capable and well disposed. He was asked, he said, to vote in such a way as to deprive them suddenly, and without cause, of their means of subsistence, and put into their places a hundred thousand other men, unknown and untried. He respectfully declined so to do, and he had now the honor of introducing the orator of the evening. That orator, who was a master in the art of amusing an audience, told two dozen of the most killing anecdotes ever perfected by a hundred repetitions on the stoop of a country store. It was delightful to see the boys laugh at them, and the austere countenances of some of the elderly auditors relax under the genial spell.

Here was a costly, elaborate, and highly successful entertainment, provided free to all comers. It was a "meeting" only in the sense in which our other Mr. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth is a meeting. It was a meeting such as a Roman politician

used to arrange for his constituents, except that it was innocent in every detail. A Roman politician of Cicero's day would write to a friend in an African province: "I begin hand-shaking to-morrow for the consulship; send me some lions." At our meeting, no gladiators were mangled; no members of the Young Men's Christian Association were devoured. It was, nevertheless, as much a device for the amusement of the auditors as the stupendous gatherings which Vespasian and Titus contemplated when they built the Coliseum.

We begin now to understand that wonderful edifice, which cost as much as a considerable city; for we are ourselves approaching a phase of politics similar to that which the Coliseum completed, and now commemorates. Our voters, like those of Rome, are coming to sit passive, waiting to see which party will provide the most magnificent and sumptuous shows. Our expenditures for political purposes are spread over so vast a territory that we cannot reckon up the sum total. If we could, it would startle the world. I think I have seen in Union Square a political display (it were too absurd to call it a meeting) that cost forty thousand dollars: a tumult of huge bands, volcanoes of fire-works, miles of torch-light procession, and a dozen politicians roaring from the stands to little groups of people. The cost of an ordinary affair of this kind, given by parties before every election, runs up to several thousands of dollars, and most of the expense is incurred for fire and noise. A remarkable circumstance is, that scarcely any of the work done on these occasions is voluntary. All is paid for in some kind of value; generally, in money down. Within the memory of men not very old, the Tammany Society could command willing service from the *élite* of the young men of New York on every occasion when hard work was needed. It was once a distinction to young men of position to be the secretary of a ward committee, and such it remained, so long as posts of that kind yielded nothing but honor and satisfaction. So, at least, our elders tell us. We know but too well that that precious element of disinterestedness is now absent from our politics. Perhaps there never was quite so much of it as our old politicians think there was, and it began very early to diminish. At present, in the ninety-fifth year of the Constitution, we are face to face with a state of politics of extreme simplicity, of which money is the motive, the means, and the end. What was the last presidential election but a contest

of purses? The longest purse carried the day, and it carried the day because it was the longest. Some innocent readers, perhaps, have wondered why the famous orators who swayed and entertained vast multitudes night after night, and day after day, have not been "recognized" in the distribution of offices. Most of them were paid in cash, from ten dollars a night to a thousand dollars a week. We have outlived the primitive stage of development when an illustrious speaker could feel compensated for splitting his throat by four years of poverty-stricken exile at a foreign capital.

I have not a thought of reproach for any of those gentlemen. The laborer is worthy of his reward, and they were laboring honorably in their vocation. I wish merely to state that, in the inevitable working of things, our politics have become a *business*, in which few take a laborious part unless they are paid for it.

The business is extensive and peculiar. It has many branches, and, like other businesses, it cannot be advantageously carried on except by men who possess capital; for our political bosses now engage in operations that require long preparation and large outlay, the result of which is uncertain. They make losses. They also make those losses good. There is a boss in the city of New York who will take a contract for putting a gentleman into Congress. Pay him so much, say, for example, thirty-five thousand dollars, and you may go to sleep for six weeks, wake up, and find yourself member-elect. One of our city members amuses his friends by relating his interview with this contractor, when the sum we have just mentioned was named as the fair price for the work to be done. "Yes," said the boss, "I will do the job for thirty-five thousand dollars, and you shall have no further trouble." These may not be the precise words spoken, but that was their substantial meaning. The client expressed surprise at the amount of the fee demanded. By degrees the contractor dropped to fifteen thousand, and there he remained firm, saying that "the thing could not be done for less." The candidate discovered, by conducting the canvass himself, that the boss had spoken the truth, for his "legitimate and unavoidable expenses" did actually amount to more than fifteen thousand dollars. He would have done well to employ the contractor.

I have had the pleasure of beholding this child of his era. Blame him not. He has grown out of the circumstances of the

case. He is a necessity of the situation. We sometimes see innocent creatures, by having too easy access to masses of rich nutriment, bloated to enormous proportions, even past recognition. Such are the flies called into being on the wharves where sweet-crusted sugar-barrels are landed and lie in rows for many days softening in the sun. Such are the rats in a cheese ship. Such are the hideous things that crawl and swell in the ooze of a slaughter-house. It is not the fault, but the dreadful calamity, of these creatures that they are where they are, and are able to do what they do. They only do, in a rough and wrong way, the work which we ought to have done in a right and civilized way. On just conditions, even Tweed could have been a useful and a faithful servant. He might have served us as dog, not preyed upon us as wolf. In his capacity of wolf, he cost us two or three hundred millions of dollars; when we might have had him as a shaggy, serviceable dog, on strictly reasonable terms: a proper daily bone securely *his* as long as he earned it, and a snug kennel when his working days were over.

We use familiarly this new word, boss. What is a boss? He is simply a man who can get to the polls on election day masses of voters, who care little or nothing for the issues of the campaign, and know of them still less. We may have, for example, in one of our cities, five hundred Italians or Poles, strangers in a strange land, scarcely able to use its language, and totally unacquainted with its politics. One of their number, having some vantage-ground of access to them, assists to get them naturalized, cultivates his influence over them, and acquires, by various arts and devices, the power to dispose of their votes. He, in effect, casts their votes for them, and holds those votes as a commodity to be disposed of for a consideration of some kind. He is a boss. There are as many bosses as there are sets, cliques, and nationalities in a city, all subject to the head-central boss of a political party. Nor is bossism confined to large cities. Wherever there is a mass of unassimilated population, there are sure to arise bosses to marshal, wield, and vote it. In virtuous rural districts, there are men who know where to find, and how to deal with, the men whose principles require them to vote for the candidate that pays their poll-tax. I have had, I say, the opportunity of viewing a boss of national notoriety, as he rode gayly home from Albany in a palace car, surrounded by people who are called

his "friends." He is an improvement on the pugilists and cormorant-thieves of a remoter period; for America is that blest land of the earth where nothing is as it ought to be, and where everything unceasingly improves—even the boss! The Emerald Isle gave him birth; the streets of New York, education. Without flattery he may be called a broth of a boy; tall, straight, ruddy, robust. He even looks handsome, as he stands in the middle of the car surrounded by home-returning members and retainers. Illiterate as he is, he has evidently studied and long practiced the arts by which personal popularity is created and extended. He nods gracious recognition to individuals in the outer ring, and behaves in all respects like the powerful prince he feels himself to be. In the midst of much talk of unknown purport, we hear him say that he would accept no office unless there was "plenty of patronage to it." So many young men, he explains, were devoted to his service that he would not think of "taking anything unless it gave him a chance to take care of them." There are, in truth, political clubs called by his name. To see that brawny and good-tempered Irishman walking abroad in his district, at a time when politics are active, is to get an idea how the chief of a clan strode his native glen when a marauding expedition was on foot. He lives in a handsome house, too, and has more property to his name than any man has ever yet been able to get by legitimate public service in the United States. Observe him sauntering into a corner grog-shop, which immediately fills with a crowd of his retainers. He treats the whole crowd, except alone the individual who pays the money. He will sometimes pass the whole day and evening in treating his district, but he takes care not to drink while he is on duty. One of these gentry, it is true, declined an office, of which the salary was fifty dollars a week, on the ground that such a pitiful sum would not pay for his rum and cigars! He meant the rum and cigars he was obliged to give, *ex-officio*, to his followers.

An ordinary mortal could not successfully hold even a second-rate boss-ship. Talent enough has been developed and trained in that vocation to clean the streets of a great city, provided the doing of *that* was the road to fortune. The boss, as agent and organizer of spoliation, is himself a prey to every minor scoundrel; for at certain seasons he is in a position that makes it perilous to say No, to any living creature. It requires tact, self-possession, and resources of mind to move about among needy

people, an embodied Yes, with a pocket full of money, and yet have some of it left after election. An eminent boss lately remarked to an interviewer: "It takes years of experience in politics to enable a man to guard himself against strikers, and even then he is not altogether safe. In old times they used to get up target companies and clam-bakes, giving candidates the privilege of paying the bills. They go for solid cash now."

Money, money, everywhere in politics; money in prodigal abundance—*except* where it could secure and reward good service to the public: hecatombs for the wolves; precarious and scanty bones for the watch-dogs! That is the spectacle everywhere presented to us. We need not regard the anonymous paragraphs assuring us that it was "the last million" which carried Indiana. Whenever the word million is mentioned, it is the privilege of reasonable beings to become at once incredulous. But how can we set aside the thrice-printed assertion of the present Secretary of State, that the October election in Maine last year was carried by "the application of arguments we could not meet." He meant money. On the other hand, the public was assured that the opposing party "flooded the city of Bangor with money." Experienced politicians evidently regarded the contest as a mere trial of management between two individuals, each having the resources of a national party to draw from. "Blaine," said an angry Republican at the time, "had everything he could desire. Money, speakers, everything was placed at his disposal. He had but to say what he wanted, and he received it. The State has gone Democratic; Blaine *alone* is to blame, and he can't shift the responsibility." We are all, I fear, so hardened to this tone and style of remark, that we have lost the power to feel what a lapse it is from our ideal of government. Whether we accept Mr. Blaine's assertion, or that of his opponents, where are we to place in the political system the people of Maine?

The critical business, we are told, is to get the vote all "in," and it was, perhaps, in that department that Mr. Blaine was wanting. In the adjacent State of New Hampshire, it is computed, four thousand men are brought home every election from distant places to vote "where they keep their trunk." They enjoy a free ride from points as distant as Chicago and Milwaukee. In one of the closely divided localities of that State, we are assured, there is an inn-keeper who is so accommodating as to store away in the garret of his hotel a row of a dozen or so of

empty trunks, each representing a vote, sure to come from some remote place on the day before election.

Two questions must have occurred to non-political persons on learning such facts as are here but slightly indicated: Who furnishes the money for such large expenditures? and, What is the motive of the givers? The sum total is so great as to destroy our claim to possess cheap government. It is doubtful if there has ever been a dearer government than that of the United States, if we reckon politics as one of the items of expenditure. It is not cheap to pay responsible executive officers a precarious pittance per annum, if it costs a million dollars every year or two to change them. It is not cheap to put low-priced men into legislative chambers, if we are also to run a lobby of millionaires. It were useless for a mere disinterested inquirer to try and compute the cost of the last presidential election, since no record was made of many important items, and those who know them are interested in keeping the secret. From the assembling of the conventions at Chicago and Cincinnati to the day of election in November, the expenditure was continuous and profuse. Who provided the money? There is abundant reason to infer that a large portion of it was contributed by individuals and corporate bodies who had something more than a patriotic interest in the result. We know the men who conducted the expenditures. They were not, as a class, holders of offices, nor candidates for office; and it is a thing too obvious that they are not of that rarest order of persons who are capable of prolonged disinterested exertion. There is reason to believe that the Government is coming to be rather an appendage to a circle of wealthy operators than a restraint upon it—a circle that desires to keep the Government weak and manageable, that it may be subservient to their purposes.

The recent explosion in the Post-office Department at Washington still needs elucidation; but attentive readers of the testimony so far called forth can discern the methods employed. We see a dozen men, after corrupting, by petty gifts and "dinners costing from ten to fifty dollars each," a vast number of people, "from governors and senators to messengers and porters," make a liberal contribution to "the expenses of the campaign," and endeavor to purchase in advance the favor and acquiescence of a candidate for the presidency. They appear to have gained nearly a million dollars by their contracts, and to have poured

out half of it in conciliating real and imaginary opposition. If a campaign were running close, such men can still afford to add an extra contribution to the party funds. It is highly probable that an important part of the enormous sums spent last year in electing a President came from persons who had similar reasons for their liberality.

Some of them, in decent gratitude, should have given money by the million, for they made it by the million; and that, not through corruption, but through the inevitable weakness of watch-dogs underfed and insecure, when set to guard saddles of mutton and rounds of beef. Suppose they refrain from the furtive bite (and most of them do), with what moral force can poor and anxious officials, without hold upon their places, defend the people's interest against syndicates of bankers? Three years ago, the Government had still some four-per-cent. bonds for sale, which were going off in moderate amounts to legitimate investors, about as rapidly as they could be conveniently delivered. Suddenly investors are informed that a syndicate in New York had taken all that were left, amounting to a hundred and fifty millions of dollars. The Government had no more of them for sale. The press broke into commendation of this fine stroke of finance; but it did not seem in the least commendable to the ordinary investor of hard-earned money, nor to mothers and children who had been advised to invest a too limited inheritance in Government bonds. The almost immediate increase in the value of the hundred and fifty millions was three per cent., so that a handful of men in New York, London, and elsewhere made a profit of four and a half millions. There was no corruption here. But why this readiness to throw an enormous gain into the laps of men who had already too much, to the disadvantage of the people of the United States? Members of that syndicate could well afford to come down handsomely when an election was in prospect.

Such things inevitably occur in a country where the government grows weaker, while everything else grows stronger,—a country that puts the small man inside the government and leaves the big man outside. Observe what is now taking place in the magnificent prairie lands of the North-west, once the heritage of the people. The secret of America's rapid development is, that a pioneer could get from five to fifteen good crops from the virgin soil of his Government land, with little expense. This has

been the poor man's opportunity, from the beginning of the country's settlement. It has covered a great part of the western world with thriving towns and populous counties. It has been the magnet of attraction to the stalwart immigrant, who found, on his arrival at his little plot of land, that Nature had deposited upon it, for *him*, the accumulated richness of a hundred centuries of growth and decay. He had to do little more than scratch the surface, and put in his seed. In seven years the product of that virgin land paid for his farm, built house and barn, fenced fields, planted an orchard, sent for father and mother, and paid a family quota to the school-house and cabinet organ. At present, rich men are "skinning the prairies" of that virgin wealth, swooping down upon tracts of thirty thousand acres, robbing them of that quality which gave the poor man his chance, and filling the western world with roving laborers, who work on these prodigious farms in the summer, and starve as best they can through the winter. It was government by lobby that authorized that.

It is really interesting to notice the ease with which enormous amounts of money are got for purposes of waste and plunder, and the extreme difficulty with which just and elevated legislation is accomplished. What citizen of New York, for example, a State upon which Nature has lavished all her gifts in imperial profusion, and which is inhabited by as large a proportion of worthy and public-spirited persons as any other province of equal extent in the world—what citizen of New York, I say, has not in his heart accepted the invitation of the Government of Canada to join it in rescuing the shores of Niagara from base disfiguration? No great amount of money would be required: but years pass, and this most obviously right and becoming thing cannot be done. Has the reader seen the new capitol at Albany? Every patriotic son of the Empire State should go upon an expiatory pilgrimage to it, and pass penitential hours in gazing upon its immeasurable iniquities. Whenever I have the pleasure of strolling about beautiful Albany, I am drawn to that accursed and shameful heap of spoil as irresistibly as a floating spar is drawn to a huge and dirty iceberg. Two millions were shot into the cellar of it. A writer in the "*American Cyclopaedia*," halting at the end of a long calculation, can just find breath enough to gasp: "Its ultimate cost can only be conjectured." Few cities were more abundantly supplied with public buildings than Albany; but here in the

midst of them rises this unspeakable pile of stone, so vast that it will require, it is said, two thousand tons of coal a year to keep it warm. The greatest lawgivers and orators the world ever saw, Solon, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Cicero, were not accommodated as honorable members from the Fourth and Sixth wards are accommodated here. The room in which Chatham spoke, in which Burke delivered immortal speeches, in which Fox, Pitt, and Sheridan debated, to say nothing of the reverberating hall in which Randolph, Calhoun, Clay, Webster, and Preston were so often heard, was beggarly compared with the splendid chambers of this enormous interior. There is only one patriotic thing to do with it. It should be taken down, in contrition and humility, by behest of the people whom it dishonors. The materials should be sold to the best advantage for some useful purpose. The ground should be leveled, and the land respectfully given back to the city that presented it.

The mere interest of the money wasted upon this capitol would give the city of New York clean streets forever.

The inquiry is interesting, too, why the American people, who, in private dealings, are as honest as any people in the world, should exhibit moral weakness when they are acting for the public. There are men in public offices who would not take a postage-stamp from a private individual, and yet, as office-holders, they not only have no conscience, but will frankly avow that they have none. I have heard them do so. According to the historian Mommsen, the noble Romans showed the same peculiarity. Writing of the virtuous period of Roman history, 167 B. C., Mommsen says: "The conscience of the Romans, otherwise in economic matters so scrupulous, showed, so far as the state was concerned, remarkable laxity"; and he quotes, in illustration, the language of Cato, who observed, that "he who stole from a private person ended his days in chains and fetters, while he who stole from the public ended them in gold and purple." Nevertheless, the turpitude of stealing from the public is far greater than stealing from an individual.

Neither the Romans nor the Greeks can teach us much in politics; for their system rested, as ours did till 1861, upon a basis of slavery, and they derived a great part of their revenues from the spoliation of other states. The free citizens, comparatively few in number, had, both in their position and quality, something of the hereditary noble. Our experiment of government

by the whole people, for the whole people, is absolutely original, and we entered upon it only twenty years ago. It devolves now upon the American people to *create* the art of government by the whole people,—government by all the mind we have,—for the good of all the people equally. We have to do this greatest work of the human race with little aid from precedents. We have made a truly wonderful and hopeful beginning, but only a beginning, and we are still obliged to repeat the words of poor Hamilton, spoken in 1789: “The business of America’s happiness is still to be done.”

We should naturally look to England for some guidance here. We owe very much indeed to that great country for the existence even of our experiment. But the experience of a tight little island does not throw much light upon our continental problem. The people there have little more voice in the selection of governing persons than the people of New York had in the original selection and repeated réelection of Fernando Wood. There appears to be no such thing in the world as the original selection of candidates by a constituency. Perhaps there never will be. Perhaps it is, in the nature of things, impossible. We can say that in a country which has had a Parliament for eight centuries, not one eminent member of the same was ever selected from the mass of the people and placed in Parliament by a constituency. Forty years ago, the Duke of Newcastle’s son took a fancy to a young man recently his fellow-student at Oxford; and the Duke, being in want of a member safe to vote on the Tory side, put that younger son of a Liverpool merchant into Parliament, against the will of his constituents, and over the head of a distinguished lawyer of much parliamentary experience. This outrage, as we should style it, gave the illustrious Gladstone to the British empire. Not long after, the good-natured Marquis of Lansdowne read, with very warm approval, an article in the “Edinburgh Review,” written by another merchant’s son, T. B. Macaulay. To strengthen the Whig side of the House, the Marquis, by a monstrous abuse of power, gave this young man a seat also. About the same period, Lord Durham, at Lady Blessington’s house in London, was struck with the fluent, incisive talk of young Disraeli. It ended with his lordship’s lifting the young man, by main strength, into Parliament. Palmerston bought his first seat outright, for five thousand pounds. The great men of the last century owed their seats to similar influences. Edmund Burke was the private secretary

of a great lord, and was placed in Parliament by the exertion of that great lord's will. It were easy to show, by multiplying instances, that the strength and glory of the British Parliament has been due, in every generation, to similar abuses of power. It was for this reason that the Duke of Wellington, as we see by the last volume of his correspondence, opposed all the reform bills of his time. He perceived that nothing had yet been evolved in Europe capable of doing, with reasonable efficiency, what had been done from the beginning of time by the hereditary principle. He did not say, in so many words, that the art of electing had not yet been created; but this was evidently his opinion. He took it for granted that the abolition of rotten boroughs would fill Parliament with rich noodles, to the exclusion of the kind of men who have given to that body much of its efficiency, and all the splendor of its reputation.

"Make me a constitution," said King Murat to Lord Holland. Lord Holland wisely replied: "You might as well ask me to build you a tree." That brave old oak, the realm of Britain, has a growth of a thousand years behind it, and it will continue, as we trust, another thousand years, growing, perfecting, rising, in ever closer alliance and friendship with the United States. But we, too, have to attain real strength by the same slow process of growth. We, too, have to meet evils as they come up, and thus, in our own way, and on our own principles, evolve an art which has as yet no existence—the art of getting by deliberate selection the few men at the summit of affairs who naturally belong there.

The late Mr. Carlyle said many things which now seem to us mere dyspepsia, but there is one idea, to which he returns again and again in all of his works, which is of immortal value. This idea is, that men can only work with success when they work in harmony with unalterable facts. In our governmental affairs, as they stand at this moment, we disregard certain unalterable facts. We have done so, in some degree, from the beginning, but particularly since the public service was suddenly degraded and debauched by Andrew Jackson. Unalterable conditions are now proving too strong for us. One fact of all the life on our planet is, that the strong govern; and this is a fact to which the whole progress of our race is due. In every thousand human beings there are a certain fifty or so who are much abler than the rest. This is equally the case with the apples on a tree, the straw-

berries on a vine, the ants in a hill, and buffaloes in a herd, as with men in a community. This small fifty or so of the strong will always rule the rest. Let us arrange our government as we will; call it a despotism or a commune; from this fact we can never escape. The world is often blessed by the weak; but it is always governed and owned by the strong. All that the nine hundred and fifty can ever do is to limit the power of the strong a little, and compel them to use it with moderation, and in accordance with public law. But the great fact remains forever beyond our altering. Look around: after fifty years of fattening the wolf and starving the dog, we have nearly succeeded in eliminating from public life the natural chiefs of men, who indeed smile with mild derision at the idea of belonging to it. Government is substantially *left* to the order of men who are capable of squabbling for patronage; and, in many instances, places of importance are filled by dummies. "We find it cheaper," said one of those natural chiefs, "to put men into the legislature, than to make terms with them after they are in."

But do the strong men the less rule us? They govern in and by the lobby. They control railroads. They found and manage huge enterprises. What have they in common with the dirty bar-keepers who fill the places in municipal governments which it was once the reward of a virtuous life-time to possess! They get what they want through the bar-keepers. The lamentable difference is, that the people have no useful and just check upon the capitalists. Their power is limited only as that of the unhappy Czar of Russia is limited—by the knowledge that men who are pressed beyond endurance have now the means of inflicting a terrible vengeance. Men of native force, acting legitimately within a government, clothed with the might and majesty of law, can hold in due restraint the whole body of the strong, and make it even their pride to serve the many. But you cannot get an empire governed by a parcel of ravenous bosses and precarious clerks.

It is, moreover, a very simple but unchangeable fact, that the most legitimate business of politics can only be done by a class that has time and money at its command. "Three wagon-loads of tickets" were "bunched" in Tammany Hall last November, and this was but one concluding item of an expenditure continued for six months, and for which the public makes no provision. Who is to do these huge jobs of bunching? In more primitive times

and lands, nobilities did all the bunching, or had it done ; for they alone had the wagons or the time, and upon them devolved, of simple necessity, the whole burden, both of politics and government. They alone had time to attend to public business. With us, as a rule, in dense communities, only bar-keepers have leisure, and it was they who chiefly managed politics until the prodigious profits of the vocation called into being the political boss. The system of hereditary nobility, with all its abuses and absurdities, *was* in sufficient harmony with facts to carry the world along, age after age. That system was a necessity to primitive man, for the reason that primitive man did not, and does not, know how to elect his chiefs. In the early ages, it required the whole industry of a nation to maintain a few hundred families in sufficient ease and abundance for civilization to be created, and those families held the precious charge, as it were, in trust for mankind. Nobilities were long the armed defenders of the community ; and, in later periods, by nobilities in state and church, art was sustained, science was advanced, manners were improved, literature was nourished. We can say more even than this : By nobilities the problem of just liberty has been wrought out, so far as it has yet been done. Who extorted Magna Charta ? Not a band of anxious peasants. Who resisted Charles I. ? It was the noble class who did most that was wise and good in that revolution. Who drew the Habeas Corpus act ? An hereditary nobleman. Who expelled James II. ? English nobility. Who did most that was wise and humane in the French Revolution ? The nobility of France and their immediate circle. The movement began in the *château* ; and, in truth, the peasantry lived so near starvation that they had no thought but to submit. Who began, controlled, and directed the American Revolution ? The nobility of the American colonies. Washington, Jefferson, Randolph, and the greater number of their colleagues had the three essential qualities of noblemen, namely, native superiority, command of their time, and training in public business. They were as genuine a nobility as ever existed. It *belonged* to them to take care of the public weal, and they were fitted for this sublime vocation by character, by circumstances, and by practice. American nobility, too, made the Constitution of 1787, and it was the relics of that nobility who started the Government, and brought it on with success and glory for the first forty years. And that small class would still be competent to the task, if we could only have

remained three millions of planters, farmers, mechanics, fishermen, and slaves.

"Shall we doubt," said Dr. Franklin, in the Convention of 1787, "finding *three or four men* in all the United States, with public spirit enough to bear sitting in peaceful council, merely to preside over our civil concerns, and see that our laws are duly executed!"

Dr. Franklin was a great man, but he had not the gift of prophecy. He was far from discerning that, before the Constitution was a hundred years of age, that small but competent nobility upon which he relied with so much confidence would be swamped and overwhelmed by a torrent of people, and that all the superior intellect of America would find scope in merely "growing up with the country." He had been himself a man of leisure at the age of forty-two, and there was a small number of such in all the colonies, down to the time when he delivered his speech recommending that the higher offices of government should be unsalaried. His idea was practically adopted. It has been adhered to ever since, in spite of the altered circumstances of the country; for to give a Seward or an Evarts eight thousand dollars a year for being Secretary of State is to get their services for nothing, and charge them thirty thousand dollars a year for the privilege of serving us.

The system of gratuitous service worked ill from the beginning; and it has worked worse every year since. It has proved to be a system of starving the dog and nourishing the wolf. Hamilton and Jefferson, before they had been twelve months in office, were pining to resign because they could not make their salaries do. They did not say so at the time. Public men often have two reasons for their conduct: one is the reason; and the other is the reason they give. In later writings, both of them avow the fact frankly enough. Aaron Burr was not ruined by his duel; he was ruined through being lured away into public life before he had completed his fortune. I will take the liberty of adducing a more recent and familiar instance, for the purpose of showing where our difficulty lies. We have several times, of late years, seen Mr. George W. Curtis gallantly stand forth in defense of principle, in political conventions; and, doubtless, there are many persons in the State of New York who would gladly see him enter public life. What man, indeed, could better serve his State or country, or more worthily

represent them, than one in whom are united public spirit, high culture, high principle, a distinguished and winning personality? Of all the qualifications of a nobleman, he lacks but one; but, alas, that is a fatal lack. He has not the command of his time. He is a member of the most arduous of all professions; for there is no work done in the world which expends vitality so fast as writing for the public. It is a work which is never done. It accompanies a man upon his walks, goes with him to the theater, gets into bed with him, and possesses him in his dreams. If he stoops to kiss his baby, before he has reached the requisite angle, a point occurs to him, and he hangs in mid-air with vacant face and mind distraught. "What's the matter?" says Mrs. Emerson, in the middle of the night, hearing her husband groping about the room. "Nothing, my dear, only an idea!"

Mr. Curtis, I say, stands up before the people of New York to contend for purer politics, through a civil service which shall tend to make the servants of the public safe, dignified, and honorable fathers of families. What is his reward? To be invited to go all over the country making more speeches of the same kind, abandoning his private duties, relinquishing his career, leaving an Easy Chair vacant, which is an easy-chair only to him. It cannot be. In some way, we have to make it *possible* for such men as he to give themselves to the public service. The house of Harper and Brothers, who are wise enough to want Mr. Curtis, have known how to make it possible for him to expend his energies and talents in *their* service; and if the State of New York wants him, the State of New York must outbid the Harpers. This is the decree of eternal justice, which no amount of Fourth of July palaver can alter. In England, when Mr. Cobden was in a similar embarrassment between public and private duty, the liberal party raised four hundred thousand dollars, with which to set him up in business as Public Man. So, also, the Whigs sent Macaulay to India, for the sole purpose of enabling him to secure that fundamental requisite, the command of his time. We have yet to learn how to do such things as these in a better way.

Nor is Mr. Conkling any better off than Mr. Curtis, under our system of starving out the gallant and high-bred dog, and leaving all the rich pickings for the wolf. His profession is less exacting than that of Mr. Curtis, and far more liberally rewarded; but he has had, it is said, at least one escape from death through

attempting to be public man and private man at the same time. Not long ago, I happened to be in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington when the Senate marched through it, two by two, to join the House of Representatives in their chamber, at the other end of the building. It was painful to see how battered, worn, and shaky many of the Senators were. They had been strong men originally; many of them unusually tall, broad, and massive. They were prematurely infirm, the spring gone from their step, the light from their faces, the innocence and joy from their hearts. I could not but think of Thiers, gay and alert at eighty, full of power, fire, and cheerfulness; of Palmerston, prime minister at eighty-four, coming out of his house early in the morning, and taking a spring over the railings, to find out whether he was beginning to grow old; of Wellington, riding after the hounds at fourscore; of Washington, all day in the saddle to the last week of his life; of Jefferson, so erect and jocund at eighty-two; of Chief-Justice Marshall, merrily playing quoits at Richmond when he was past eighty. Those shaky Senators, among whom it has been almost a distinction not to have had a touch of paralysis, are trying to do three things at once, either of which is a task for a man—namely, statesmanship, politics, and business.

The present time is favorable for the consideration of these topics. Recent events, such as the dead-lock in the Senate, the pitiful war of nominations, the vain struggle of New-Yorkers for clean streets, and the mail-contract exposures, must have made it plain to all but politicians, and even to some of them, that the preliminary step *toward* the development of the art of popular government is to take the public business out of politics! Every disinterested person must now see that the weak point of our present system is the erroneous *tenure* upon which public office is held. Our next task is to make the watch-dog as *sure* of his dinner as the wolf now is, and to make his dinner as good as the wolf's. Better, it could not be; for the wolf riots on the very fat of the land. The task that lies immediately before us is to exalt and protect our servants and legitimate our bosses.

The tenure, I repeat, is the first and chief point to be rectified; for a man will serve, not the power that gave him his place, nor the hand that pays him his wages, but the power that can take his place away! The mode of appointing is important; but the conditions of holding are all-important. If the offices were all sold

by auction to the highest bidder, we should have a good public service, provided the Government exacted the requisite qualifications in the purchaser, and gave him a property in his place, which should be forfeited by misconduct alone. No public service in the world has a more spotless record than the notaries of France, who, for four centuries past, have transacted the everyday law business for the French people, at rates which our cheapest lawyers would despise. Those notaries buy, sell, inherit, and bequeath their places, and have done so for centuries. But the Government imposes three conditions, and performs two duties, all designed to give just protection both to the public and to the notary. The conditions are, that no man can be a licensed notary who has not served a seven-years' apprenticeship to the business, and served for one year as chief clerk to a notary. He is also strictly limited as to the fee he can charge for every service. These are the conditions. If the Government stopped there, it would do as we do—starve the dog and fatten the wolf. It protects these public servants by limiting their number, and by decreeing that no legal document shall have validity unless it is attested by a notary. But all this would not suffice. It remains to protect the public against dishonesty, as well as against incompetency; and this is done by holding the commission of a notary forfeit upon conviction of breach of trust.

There you have a service that necessarily fulfills its purpose, because the system secures adequate fitness and supplies adequate motive. In four centuries, no important breach of trust has been committed in France by a member of the notarial guild, in whose custody rests the whole real estate of France, the honor of its families, and the credit of its business men.

The tenure is the vital point. Add to the right tenure, the principle of paying the market price for all the kinds of labor employed, and we shall have a public service that will cease to be a lowering influence in politics; and add one more liberal profession to the resources and the hopes of virtuous families. The strength of a nation is in its families: well-ordered governments favor the multiplication and building up of families. We may just as well have a hundred thousand strong and happy families maintained by the civil service, as half a million anxious office-holders and demoralized office-seekers. One of the most obvious needs of the time is the strengthening of the class between the capitalist and the operative—the middle class, in

which human nature thrives best and enjoys most. Every one laments the awful, blind power of huge capital run by steam. The most sanguine person must sometimes dread the ever-growing influence of corporations. The only counterpoise to the dead-weight of wealth is the might of living numbers marshaled by an intellectual nobility. It becomes us, therefore, to nourish and strengthen, in every legitimate way, the professions which give men standing, influence, and independence, without the possession of wealth. Literature might be a career among us: it is robbed of its meager gains because it cannot afford lobby enough at Washington to get an international copyright law. The college professors would naturally be a splendid and beloved portion of a true republican nobility: they are frittered away in numberless petty colleges. Teachers, too, share the debilitating consequences of a precarious tenure. Worst of all: the public service, the Government, the natural and only adequate check upon capitalists and corporations, the only way in which the million can make their power effectual against the millionaire, the natural career of young ambition, the field for enlightened public spirit,—this has become the prey of the political boss.

We are going to change all this, and soon. As nobilities have worked out the problem of freedom for us so far, it is noblemen who must still carry it on toward perfection. When I say noblemen, I mean, in particular, men of public spirit who have command of their time. We are beginning to have such a class, and it is beginning to show itself worthily in various directions. It is our singular happiness to live in a country where every good citizen belongs to the aristocracy, and does actually exhibit the traits of character which in older countries are supposed to be peculiar to the privileged orders. It happens, however, that a prodigious number of them are younger sons, who must go out into the world, make a career, and “grow up with the country.” I call upon the gentlemen of the Manhattan Club to join the gentlemen of the Union League; I urge similar societies in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, St. Louis, and other cities, to come to an understanding, and agree upon it as the issue of 1884, to give the public service back to the people, and to make the Government respectable by taking just care of the dignity and the career of the public servants. The candidate has made himself obvious to the whole country. He has shown

his faith in a rational civil service by introducing it, and maintaining it for years, in a conspicuous public office.

We have pampered the wolf long enough; let the dog now have a turn. We have tried the system of organized distrust; let us now see what presidents, governors, and mayors will do for us if they are chosen for one long term without eligibility to a second. Elect a mayor of New York for fifteen years; pay him a two-hundredth part of what Tweed stole per annum, clothe him with adequate power, hold him responsible, surround him with honorable conditions, and circumstances; and, when he has done his work, let us dismiss him to private life as well off as if he had succeeded in the grocery line. Let him retire from office honored and rich. Let Congress build suitable houses for the cabinet and judges, multiply their incomes by four, and no longer permit a Secretary of State to pay for the dinners given to the diplomatic corps, the guests of the nation. Let us in all respects reverse the system introduced by small men for small purposes, and try faithfully that of giving the public servants as fair a chance for distinction and abundance as private business offers.

That close observer of men and things, Governor Burnett, of California, expresses once more, in his "Recollections of an Old Pioneer," his deliberate conviction that "the masses will never permit a sound conservative amendment of our theory, except by revolution," which he thinks will occur within the next fifty years. He thinks it probable that several revolutions will be necessary before we get upon a comfortable basis. I hope for better things. The victorious Democratic party of 1800, which saved the country from its first great peril, and ruled the country for twenty-eight years better than any country had ever been ruled before (though that is not saying much), was composed of three ingredients, which still exist among us in the richest profusion, and which can again be united to carry any good measures that are in harmony with the inalienable rights of human nature. Those ingredients were: First, the large, benign, serene Jefferson, and a small circle of kindred philosophers, who, from mere native superiority, from simple nobility of mind, *loved* the common welfare; next to them, adroit managers, chief of whom in 1800 was Aaron Burr; finally, the masses of the people, absorbed in their private affairs, but open to conviction, and capable of appreciating, after due presentation, any "amend-

ment of our theory" which shall be truly "sound." These ingredients can again be brought together for a patriotic purpose, and the work can be done during the next three years by men of leisure. Let them do their duty, and the masses will never be wanting to theirs. They have never been wanting hitherto. The part of a busy people in republican politics is similar to that of the jury in a court of justice, and it never can be much other than that. The people is master. The verdict of the jury is law ; but the proper presentation of the Case devolves on the few.

JAMES PARTON.